
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Property Address:	1845 Kalorama Road, NW	X	Agenda
Landmark/District:	Washington Heights Historic District		Consent Calendar
		X	Preliminary Review
Meeting Date:	December 15, 2011	X	Alteration
H.P.A. Number:	12-141		New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Steve Callcott		Demolition
			Subdivision

Architect Laurence Caudle (Hickok Cole Architects), representing Brookland Homes LLC, returns for ongoing conceptual design review for a four-story rear addition to a three-story plus basement brick row house. When reviewed in November, the Board found the rear addition to be overwhelming for the building and its context, and asked that it be reduced in size and impact on the rear alley.

Proposal

The previous proposal called for retaining and renovating the existing row house and constructing a four-story addition with an open courtyard between them. The existing house is approximately 37 feet deep; with the courtyard and addition, it would have extended approximately 103 feet into the lot, with a 17 foot deep rear yard for two parking spaces off the alley.

The revised proposal calls for eliminating the courtyard, pushing the rear addition directly to the back wall of the house. The 37 foot deep main block of the building would be retained; the four story addition would extend 53 feet, for a combined depth of 90 feet. The rear yard would extend 30 feet from the rear of the addition. The top floor has also been redesigned as a sloped roof form with single shed dormer window; the sides of the top floor would be cementitious panels.

A basement areaway is proposed on the front elevation, providing direct access from the street to a basement unit. The exterior stair would branch off the primary walk to the front door, accessing a new entrance at the location of an existing basement window.

Evaluation

Eliminating the courtyard and pushing the addition closer to the existing main block of the house improves its compatibility by bringing it more in line with other rear wings on adjacent properties. The addition would no longer overlap into the zone of the rear yards traditionally occupied by garages, leaving a 30 foot deep rear yard. While the revised design of the top floor as a roof form with a dormer window has not resulted in a noticeable change to the addition's massing, it is an aesthetic improvement that helps break the addition down visually into smaller component parts.

As the project continues to be developed, the applicants may want to reconsider the use of cement panels for the top floor, which were intended to suggest a lighter, differentiated top floor that would break down the addition's massing. Now that the rear elevation at the top floor has been redesigned as a roof form, the panelized treatment on the sides appears less successful. Simply extending the brick wall surface up to the roof line may be a better, simpler, and longer-lasting solution.

The proposed basement stair and entrance should also be reconsidered. The front yard of this property is extremely small, with the façade only about 14 feet from the sidewalk. The excavation and paving required for the proposed basement stair and entrance will leave very little room to adequately screen the door and stair from public view, with almost 75% of the front area devoted to the porch, stairs, and walks. The proposal is not consistent with two of the principles in the HPRB's *Preservation and Design Guideline for Basement Entrances and Windows*:

3.1: Basement entrances and areaways should be subordinate to and not dominate the setting of historic property.

3.3: It may not be possible to provide an exterior stair on properties where the first floor is close to grade, where the building is close to the sidewalk, or where the basement stair would be exposed at eye level from the sidewalk. In such instances, the extent of excavation may alter the relationship of the building to grade, overwhelm the site, or become such a prominent element that it detracts from the property's character.

As access to this unit is already being provided inside the building, it not necessary to provide an exterior entrance. Alternatively, a basement window with a shallow window well could be compatibility achieved in this location to provide light into the unit.

Recommendation

The HPO recommends that the Review Board determine that the revised preliminary design is consistent with the purposes of the preservation act, contingent on restudy of the top floor material finish of the rear addition, elimination of the exterior front basement stair, and provision being made for utility meters inside the building. The HPO recommends that final construction approval be delegated to staff.